ARCHAEOLOGICAL REMAINS OF MITHILA

By

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Before dealing with this subject, it is essential to locate the area which comprises the ancient Mithila. Our ancient literature have said much about Mithila and the modern historians have also discussed a great deal regarding the extent of its area.[1] The most scientific way of demarcating the area of the ancient Mithila is by means of local dialect known as Maithili spoken by the people of Mithila. As such the ancient Mithila comprises of the present districts of Muzaffarpur, Darbhanga and a few parts of the districts of Saharsa and Monghyr. The natural boundry also suggests the same thing, for example, it is bounded on the north by the Himalayas, and on the east, south and west by the rivers Kosi, Ganga and Gandak respectively.

No serious attempt has so far been made to explore the region with a view to assess the archaeological remains of the land. However, from the accidental discoveries so far reported from this area from time to time, we are now in a position to have some ideas of its archaeological potentialities.

Partial archaeological excavations have already been conducted in the districts of Muzaffarpur and Darbhanga at Vaishali (Muzaffarpur), Karian and Balirajgarh (Darbhanga).

The ancient Vaishali, which had once played an important role not only in the history of Mithila but of India also, has now become an important place of archaeological importance in Northen India. It is situated about 24 miles west to Muzaffarpur town. It has an immense wealth of tradition and historical legends. It is the birth place of Lord Mahabira and was the capital of the oligarchical lichchhavis from early time. It was here that the second Buddhist council was held about a hundred years after the Buddha's death. A number of ruined stupas in and around this site have been located. Recently a flat low stupa was excavated by Dr. Altekar who identified it with one of the original relic-stupas of the Buddha built by the Lichchhavis in the 6th Century B. C.[2] In the Centre of the village Basarh, there is an old mound (measuring 1770

1. For details see Thakur. History of Mithila, p. 1-20.
2. J. B. R. S., Buddha Jayanti, Special Issue, vol. ii, pp. 501 ff.

x 800 ft.) locally known as 'Rājā Basārh Kā Garh'. Partial excavations had been conducted here in 1903-04, and again in 1913-14, by Block and Spooner of the Archaeological Survey of India respectively and they have concluded that the occupation of the mound extended from the Gupta to the Mauryan period. The excavations have yielded a large number of terracotta sealings (both inscribed and symbolic) of the Gupta period. A few of the inscribed sealings refer to the name of the city of Vaishali,[3] they have placed the identity of the place with ancient Vaishali beyond doubt, as the identification of this place till recent times had been a matter of great controversy. A sort of myth had evolved round its exact location.

Subsequently the site was again excavated by the K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, Patna, under the able guidance of Dr. Altekar. The excavations have proved that the site was under the occupations of the Guptas, Kushanas, Sungas, Mauryans or even beyond Mauryans, which is revealed by the occurance of a few painted grey wares from the rampart wall of the mound. A few Black- and-red ware sherds from the Chakramdas village in the vicinity of vaishali have come out in course of excavations andthus the early date of Vaishgli may be shifted about a couple of centuries back, may be about 800 B. C.[4] Since the excavations of this phase was very limited nothing can be said with certainty regarding the culture and activities of the people using painted grey ware and Black-and-red wares.

The other excavated site in Mithila is Karian which is situated in the Rasara P. S. in the district of Darbhanga. Traditions associate this place with the famous Udayanācharya who flourished in the 10th Century A. D. He is considered to be one of the great philosophers of Nyāya of the period. The excavations at this place was undertaken by the K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, Patna in the year 1955 under the supervision of Sri V. K. Mishra, the then Research Fellow in the Institute. The earliest date oft he site according to Dr. Roy is the Gupta period.[5]

A trial excavation at Balirajgarh in the district of Darbhanga was undertaken by Sri R. Singh of the Archaeological Survey of India in the year 1963-64. He has determined the earliest date of the site to be of the 2nd Century B. C. The rampart of the mound is still preserved in a

3. An. Report. A. S. I., 1903-04, p. 81 ff; 1913-14; p. 98 ff.
4. Report of the Excavation is awaited.
5. An. Report of.the K. P. J. R. Institute, Patna, 1961, p. 8.

good condition. The mound itself is very much important from the Archaeological point of view.

The excavations so far done in Mithila have been proved to be very significant and the earliest date of its glories may be pushed back to 800 B. C. as is revealed by the excavations at Vaishali. Further it has been found that the region was well developed during the time of Mauryan, the Sungas, the Kushānas, the Guptas and upto the Pāla period as well.

The little explorations so far conducted in this region have brought to light many significant discoveries. A fairly good number of ancient mounds and monuments have been located. For example, in the district of Muzaffarpur, there is a reference of Miran Shāh Kā Dargāha in the vicinity of Vaishali. The Dargāha is situated on an ancient brick Stupa. At Common-Chapra, which is at a distance of a mile east from Vaishali, a Chatura-Mukha Śiva Linga has been discovered. A few Jain images have also been reported from the vicinity of Vaishali. All these indicate that the followers of different religions flourished together simultaneously.

In the same district there is a village named Dhanaura which is situated on an ancient mound. A fairly large number of antiquities such as Punch-Marked Coins, Mauryan and Sunga terracotta figurines and Potteries have been unearthed here in course of digging the foundation pits for constructing houses. Out of curiousity a few persons of this village have preserved them till now. In course of my exploration of this village, I got an opportunity to examine those terrocotta figurines shown to me by the person concerned. The most important among them was the figure of the Goddess Hāriti. Hāriti is the Buddhist female deity and its occurance there suggests us a good information regarding the Buddhist sway over this area during the early Christian era.

Not far away from Dhanaur, there is another ancient mound in the village Katra and as such the mound is locally know as Katrāgarh. There is a temple of the Goddess Chamundā and so the mound is also known as Chamundāgarh which is about 2 miles east of the village Dhanaur. The mound is formed out of an ancient fort. The rampart is still visible and on the four corner of the mound the bastrions are still intact. If an excavation is carried out here, it is bound to shed new light on the early history of Mithila. Every year the mound is getting robbed by the brick-robbers. A copper plate of one Ramgupta was discovered here which is

6. Indian Archaeology, 'A Review' 1958-59, p. 59.

at present preserved in the Patna Museum, Patna.[6] The inscription records the gift of the village in favour of a diety. King Jivita-Gupta and his father, Ramgupta, are known for the first time from this record. The inscription is slavently written in character of the early mediaeval period. The other important antiquarian remains found on the mound were the images of Chamundā, Śurya and Gaṇeśa, etc. of black basalt stone belonging to the Pāla period. A few Punch-Marked coins discovered from this mound are in the possession of one Sri Ramchandra Sahi of Minapur. These coins are preserved by him in his private Museum located in the same village.

In between Katra and Rajkhanda there is another mound known as Deokulidih and is fully inhabited. Near this mound there is one temple of the God Bhairava. There are lying a few pieces of Pāla sculptures. The other noted sites in the districts of Muzaffarpur are Jauridih, Chechara, Ghoshwardih etc. At Jauridih, two bronze images of the reign of Mahipāla have been discovered.[7]

Similarly, in the district of Saharsa, a quite good number of archaeological sites have been reported from time to time. At Srinagar, there is an old fort which is in a very good condition and not much damaged. Pāla images and sculptures have been reported from this place.

At Mahesi, an another important village of this district, Pāla sculptures and images have been found. The famous Tārā temple is located in this village. This village has further been identified as the native land of the reputed Āchārya Maṇḍaṇa Mishra who was a great Mimāṁsaka. Besides, the other important mounds of this district are Garhodih, Devandih, Kopagarh, Burwadih, Ghos Khan Ka Garh etc.

In the district of Darbhanga, the heart of the ancient Mithila, there are numerous sites which are of great archaeological importance. Special mention may be made of the following :—

Andhara Thari—Here an inscribed stone image was found, which records the installations of the image by Sridhara, a ministar of Nānya of the Kshatra family.[8]

Bharatpura fort—It is about 12 miles north of Madhubani town. It is a small fort. Inside the fort there is a cylindrical pillar which is worshipped as Śiva by the local people. The local Teli or Oil men claim that Raja Beraut (i. e King Virata) who flourished at about

7. Ibid,
8. J. B. O. R. S., ix, p. 303 ff,

the time of the Mahābhārata war belonged to their caste and had built the fort.[9]

Bisapi—It is another important site where a copper-plate inscription of Śivasiṃha of Mithila has been found. The inscription is dated equivalent to the year A. D. 1398. It records a grant in favour of Thakkur Vidyapati. It is alleged that it is a spurious grant. It says that it was issued from Gajarathapura. Śivasiṃha was famous independent king of the Thakur dynasty of Tirhut. He was subdued by the Delhi Sultans and had a tragic end.[10]

The next important site is in the village Panchobh which is situated five or six miles west of Laheriasarai. Between this village and the Mauza Kālī is reported to exist an extensive site dotted with mounds over an area about a mile in length. Its existence, along with the discovery of a copper-plate was first reported in 1919 by Sikdar. The higher mound in the site is known as Bangali Dih. A good deal of the site has practically been levelled down in the course of cultivation, though it is still found littered with brick-bats.

In one of the mounds near the village Kālī, in the course of levelling the ground for cultivation, a peasant found a copper-plate with inscription containing 30 lines of writing in Sanskrit in the old Nagari script. It records the grant of a village named Vanigāma in the district Jambuvānī by the King Sangrama-Gupta to a Brahmin named Kumārasvāmin of the Śāndilya Gotra who hailed from Kolancha. The record does not mention any date but has been palaeographically assigned to the 12th Century A. D. The copper-plate is now in the Patna Museum.[11]

In Khajauli P. S. there are two villages which are also important for their archaeological remains. They are Rarha-Balatpur. In the village Rarha, there is a ruined temple of Śiva probably of the Gupta period. A hexagonal Śivaliṅga is still intact there. In Balatpur also, there is one Ek-Mukha linga Śiva and two images of Viṣṇu all belonging to the Pāla period.

An another important site of this district is Mangalgarh which is situated near Naya Nagar Rly Station. The mound is a very big one. Many Pāla sculptures have been discovered here. A huge mud rampart is still intact on two sides of the mound. At present the mound is under cultivation which has resulted in heavy destruction of the mound.

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9. Bihar District Gazetteer, Darbhanga (old); p. 43.
10. I. A., xiv, p. 190; B. D. G. (Darbhanga), pp. 17-18.
11. J. B. O. R. S., v, pp. 582-592.

In the P. S. Madhavapur, there is another site on which the present village Uttara is situated. In course of digging a tank in this village a hoard of Kushanas coins was discovered. The hoard fell in the hand of an illiterate person who sold them to a goldsmith of Madhavapur @ Rs. 3/- per seer. A few coins of the hoard was procured by the authority of the Darbhanga Chandradhari Museum. Near Uttara, there is another village named Salempur where I discovered a few black and red ware sherds of the pre-Mauryan period.

Not far away from this locality I explored many old mounds there. They are Devi-Sthan, Jagat and Benipatti. They are definitely old sites. A few miles further north-east corner of Benipatti there is a village named Uchchaitha. There is an old mound in this village and it is said that it was the birth place of the renound poet Sri Kālidāsa. How far this tradition is correct it is difficult to prove. However, I found the mound belonging to the Kushāna period on the basis of the potteries found from there.

Besides the above sites in the heart of the district of Darbhanga references to the following sites have also been made as sites of archaeological importance, and they are Bhitha-Bhagwanpur, Bahera, Bhagirathapur, Tarapatti, etc.

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